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The Politics of the *Vice Canon*: Performatism or the Background Interference of Postmodernism

Viorella Manolache^{a,*}

^a Scientific Researcher III, PhD., Institute of Political Sciences and International Relations, Romanian Academy, Iuliu Maniu 1-3, Corp A, etaj 7, Sector 6, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract

The present study uses as a *background* for analysis the alternative reflexes coming not only from decreeing postmodernism to be finished stage but rather from an enumeration of *performatism's* reflexes seen as (an)other voluntarily-fabricated position much to its disadvantage. *The purpose of the study* resides in a re-launching of the *vice canon* concept as a transitional norm, a rule maintaining the dynamics of post-modern alternatives, with an accent on *performatism*, establishing the fact that by pursuing the postmodern policy of *overtaking at any price* (even if one often has to acknowledge mixed forms), the alternatives can only operate as a form of background interference, in the sense of producing parasitical signals with approximately identical wavelengths but cognizant of specific differences (in the case of *performatism*, the temporary/discreet partaking of the subject/sign in the holistic process itself). *The present study's sources of evidence* acknowledge the re-launching of *political performatism* with its nodal Eshelman-ian bookmarks towards: a direction oriented against ironically indifferent attitudes and towards accepting both individual and political responsibility in a post-ideological (post-political) context, political transcendence, the symbolic order of language and diminished-role significance games, etc. The immediate evidence obviously shows that *performatism* argues its project/program through the ensigns of postmodernism found in the *sovereign* Lyotard-ian movie, the Hutcheon-ian *relationship between ideology and subjectivity* or the reflections of *post-politics*, found at the intersection between Rancière – Badiou – Žižek.

The conclusions launch as an absolutely new element the concept of *postmodernitarism*, through a reassessment of the Rancière-ian perspective on modernitarism seen as a term of identification between the aesthetic status of the arts and the forms of fulfilling a personal task/destiny, and imbuing it with the status of a *postmodernist sharing formula*.

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* Corresponding author. Viorella Manolache Tel.: 0745267513
E-mail address: vio_s13@yahoo.com

1. Background: Postmodernism on the ruins of... postmodernism

Willingly eluding a whole theore(tizing) postmodern register (proving once more that this current can be fixed inside concepts/programs and thus accepting of theoretization) with already suggested introspection pertaining to a changing relationship between the *modern- modernism- modernity* vs. *postmodern- postmodernism- postmodernity*, the present study starts by accepting the idea that *hard postmodernism (obstinately) wills itself to be modernist*. Felix Nicolau's statement (2013) certifies the existence of more than one type of postmodernism(s) when compared to modernism(s), the formal cause of both postmodernism and modernism being identical, as the *efficient cause* is the only one to acknowledge a change of physiognomy.

Not at all risky, *hard postmodernism's* option of superimposing itself on "ready-to-be-born modernism" in a decidedly Lyotard-ian note (1997) of the axiom stating that "the postmodern is certainly part of the modern" would explain tentative operations of connection to the valences of *the hyper* (accepted as a prefix of modernistic decadence) with nodal points in the *hyper real- hypertext- hyper individual* triad.

In the presence of illustrative options of a generous per-fixoidal *alternative arsenal (of hyper, meta-, trans-, cos-, para- etc)* our conviction is that all this seems to express the essence of postmodernism itself, (still) in search of a personal language. Using *a series of technical terms when defining the perambulating concept and its specific lexical-expressive register*, far from operating a clarification, will just complicate it by entangling its concepts in false alternate options - nothing more than non-synthesizing detours confirming, in a Hassan-ian (1987) manner, a sense of *indetermanence* (an interaction in close proximity of its own contradictions) processing, in fact, an overwhelming, ambilectic postmodernism.

This offered hypothesis aims to prove that soft postmodernism is not able to concentrate the totality of modernism's inheritance. This statement can be seen as a pretext directed at amplifying their rate of interest for debates already circumscribed to both *hard and soft attitudes/pro or against postmodernism*, able to confirm thus its *ambiguity/conceptual inconsequentiality*.

We are thus in the presence of two (i)mmediate attitudes – one, favouring postmodernism (*pro-postmodernist*) which reassembles the term in a structure accepting of modernism; and the other, a contesting mode (*postmodern-skeptical*) expressing a firm position of hostility and reprobation.

This dichotomous attitude (re) irrigate the soil from a double perspective - the first taking into account the idea that the term "postmodernism" is neither good nor bad, the final option depending on the situational context, sense, influence and quality of the debate itself (Ion Bogdan Lefter – 2000); the second, accepting the opinion that postmodernism is a manoeuvrable concept, amplified by confusion, a predisposition towards connecting to one of the countless "modern fashion trends" or one of the "many overtakes" in the context of landed ambiguity – a reflex defining it as equally tempting and unattractive, non-operant and non-applicable (Umberto Eco – 1983).

But certainly one has to admit that postmodernism is far from exhausted (although it has been proclaimed as "morbid modernism", found guilty of self-referentiality, and with a predisposition towards epistemological suicide – James Parker – 2001).

2. The politics of the vice canon. Postmodernist interferences

The *purpose of the study* resides in re-launching the *vice canon* as a transitional norm, a rule presiding the dynamics of postmodern alternatives and stating that all alternatives must follow the politics of postmodernism itself, which is constituted by overtaking one's condition/state *at any price* (even when mixed forms are frequently encountered) because otherwise they are able only to operate *within interference nodes* with the avowed purpose of emitting *parasitical signals with almost identical wavelengths but accepting specific differences*.

Felix Nicolau (2013) notices that the world is over-ripe with *isms*, so postmodern descendants will find it difficult to sit "on the father's throne", therefore certifying a hiatus at the top and announcing the throne to be vacant "for a while". Hence the impossibility of formulaic sedimentations (*performatism, post-mortemism, digimodernism, globalism, planetarism, hyper-modernism, alter-modernism*) of alternate, continuously multiplicity currents (*transmodernism, cosmodernism, hypermodernism, paramodernism, metamodernism, remodelism*) confirming, through their emission of parasitical signals, a luring of the postmodern towards secondary-order local causalities of the *vice canon* – neither fragmentation nor diversification, neither de-canonization of aseptic modernist theories nor

totalizing mediation – but a transitory recourse to re-signification. Such evidence decrees that postmodernity cannot be definitely circumscribed either in the *core of space* to which it offers identity, or *in its crust*; on the contrary, it simultaneously entertains *an inside and an outside* – a verdict which now defines *interference-ridden postmodernism* as a mode – not exactly of novelty or phase of postmodernism, but rather as reflex/tendency of dissolution/amalgamation of/as a category of the new itself.

Considering, through the prism of the 1991's (and the voices of Ihab Hassan, Malcolm Bradbury, John Barth, Raymond Federman, or William Gass) as *finite* the simple late logic of modernity itself, a linear projection, a natural conclusion of modernity or an ideology of *archisms* (Ziauddin Sardar – 1997), inoperative- (mostly) in a political sense, maintained by the existence of an *anaemic background* (Zygmunt Bauman – 2000), postmodernism objectifies the threat resounding from self-closure within the fixation of a *penultimate reaction*, counterbalancing it by a type of *pullback* reaction – a mode which confirms the maxim that *any process taken sufficiently far manifests a tendency towards reversing itself or unexpectedly overturning*.

These arguments are far from gratuitous, in the same measure in which postmodernism tried nothing less than to impose a continuous trajectory upon modernity (even unto *purism*!) with the needed coda stating that its statute is guided and dependent upon certain sinusoidal directions and unexpected changes which are bound to appear periodically. Hence the present study's recourse to an *analytical background* of alternate reflexes arising from both a tendentious decreeing of postmodernism as a finite stage, and a particularizing analysis of all volitionally-fabricated ensigns which would play to its disadvantage.

Upon a temporary evaluation scale of contemporary “isms”, connected to the flux, alternate brands are (also) manifestly implicated in massive dismissals of postmodern evasions.

These projections are (sur)prised by W. J. T. Mitchell (1982) in his *tower pictorial*, as a prime- passage phase from rhetorically-centred postmodernism towards all openings created by the *capturing/ catching/ collecting* imperative, as reconfirming evidence of the fact that we are not in the presence of some replacement phenomenon, but in the process of instituting a state of interference-creating relationship, through a reconversion/reuse of late postmodernist concepts.

3. The launching of performatism...

The present study's *sources of evidence* propose a re-launching of *performatism* in general, and of *political performatism* as a special case, managing to spot any Eshelman-ian nodal landmarks in the direction which orients itself against such attitudes of ironical indifference and political individual responsibility acceptance, in a post-ideological (post-political) context: political transcendence, the symbolic order of language and diminished-role significance games, etc.

The immediate conclusion would be that *performatism* argues its own project/program by a recourse to such particulars of postmodernism as can be found in the *sovereign* Lyotard-ian *film*, in the Hutcheon-ian *relationship* between ideology and *subjectivity* or in *post-politics* reactions at the Rancière - Badiou - Žižek intersection.

In Raoul Eshelman (2008)'s opinion, postmodernism (auto)entrap itself, influenced by the concept of seeing *form* as just an antidote for *sense*, and by the temptation of falling back upon semantically-reactivated contexts. Hence the possibility of an *exit from postmodernism*, through an appeal to dispersion formulas, deconstruction and proliferation, perceived through the alternative of *performatism* (as a reaction to the prolonged agony of postmodernism itself); a tendency (neither new, nor unknown) which offers itself as a concurrent variance of moving/transgressing typically postmodern limits as stated through sign and strategy.

Focused upon unity, *performatism* appropriates a different type of subjectivity, as an answer to the difficult situation of a subject in/between postmodernism, extracted and constructed in a dense, opaque manner, in direct contact with its environment, banking on solving closed unity problems through spontaneous participation - a sequence all too often interpreted upon the conciliatory, amateur or erotic stage (Raoul Eshelman – 2008).

Due to accenting of coercive sequences rather than continuous, transgressive postmodern ones, *performatism* recharges itself from theistic precepts, which suggest a reversibility of *central-peripheral/ victim-perpetrator positions*, and note a scheme of postmodernism in which *alterity* is obtained through victimization, opting for a less-than-critical tone when it comes to abuse committed by the powers-in-the-centre. In fact, *performatism* allows a

centering which establishes proximity, individual spaces, aiming towards modernist nostalgia as explained by “the subject’s temporary involvement in holistic ‘processes’”.

The *performatist proof* finds its arguments mainly in cinematographic examples, favouring the *American Beauty*-type cinematic vision, which offers for interpretation the sense of double imagery (the homeless woman dead on the sidewalk or the empty bag floating in the wind) designed as deeply impressionistic symbolic valences, awakening an interest in the reality behind things, in the Kantian note of impression (and not rationality) annotated by the intersecting perspective offered, through Spinoza, by the “intellect focused upon one target and one aim”; and, in a Marcuse-ian acceptance, by the concept of pure creativity (Felix Nicolau – 2011). All these comments can be positioned upon the sliding sands of passion, freedom and creativity, as filtered by Pekka Himanen (2001), by a juxtaposition of protestant ethics and transparent symbolism, the fluidity of *hacker ethics* and an investing of the concept with its own program status, despite its being circumscribed by its own self-limiting jargon.

Taking into consideration the indictment against postmodernism, and insisting on its role of circumscribing the subject, *performatism* reconsiders the modernist/postmodernist distance vis-à-vis of *performance* (an abolition of the limits between life and art/ integration of the human body or subject into an artistic context) through referencing the type of “concentrated, holistic subject” (Knapp and Mitchell – 1982), or the uniquely “reduced” subject, reflected in both the ontologically sacralised Derridian difference (Eric Gans – 1997), and in the new historicism as it decrees that the *performatist era* favours the creation of *permissive chronotropes* allowing a choice between multiple possibilities of preserving integrity and freedom, by banking on *auto-therapy*.

From an inventory of *performatism*’s practice doses, one can surmise that it abandons its multitude of quotations , its authenticity, its intertextualism, while bringing back into the picture ritual, dogma, the refurbished history of the “empirically enrolled subject” with its cynical/ironic non-constants, either solid or opaque, naïve or confused, firm or heroic, and surely *ostensive* .

Performatism operates through a conciliation of dichotomies, with a clear target in therapeutically feeding metaphysical optimism - “a state of fictionally circumscribed transcendence”. Hence, the idea that one can talk about a rehabilitation of the phallus as an active, unifying agent of *performativity*, and, why not, of accession to the lyrical programme of *performatism* – a local landmark, in the explicit spirit of positions unfavourably inclined towards postmodernism, as transmitted especially through the 90’s and 2000’s manifestos (Claudiu Komartin – 2005).

4. ...and postmodernism’s interference effects. Three arguments.

Under the sign of the *vice canon*, in a Houellebecq-ian reinterpretation, Raoul Eshelman (2001) was unable to avoid the trap of mixed *performatism-postmodernism*, in the sense of accepting a metaphorical key for the filiations relationship - two brothers with opposed characters (one dominated by intellect, the other by sexuality - opposing poles seen as landmarks between which postmodern dualism can activate) and yet *alike*. Not able to deny the trap of coincidences (on an ironic ground) between *performatism-postmodernism*, Raoul Eshelman seems to be constrained by a need to warn us that *performatism* reactivates irony *only* as a result of a less-than perfect actualization of transcendent ideals.

While alluding to *performatism*’s original points, *the three arguments* the present discourse is based on illustrate the idea that *performatism produces parasitical signals with wavelengths approximately identical to postmodernism’s, but with specific differences*. These have to take into account *in the first place* the fact that *performatism* invokes the postmodern argument of *sovereign film* in a Lyotard-ian sense, of experience which is non-authorized/ with no recourse to authority, but which appears to be adventitious without invoking/reclaiming the right to “be what it is”. In fact, *performatism*’s recourse to the cinematographic registry confirms once more *the form of movement* and *underlines movement as told history*, under the authority of a general formula; an argument coming from the *acinema* zone - implying immobility and extreme mobility, lyrical abstraction, marginality and interlocutory exchanges. Only thus can *auto-therapy* connect to the libidinal processes - in the Lyotard-ian sense of subject immobility - and extreme passion agitation of its onlookers (Jean Fr. Lyotard – 2000).

The second argument would directly target the relationship established between ideology and subjectivity, as per Linda Hutcheon (1997), a fundamental pillar of postmodernism. Any challenges aimed towards the (humanist) concept of a coherent, continuous and autonomous individual are transmitted from within modernism’s

concentration upon subjectivity, its obsessive search for the *whole* representing the postmodern investigation born out of a duplication of its own discourse. Postmodernism operates both with the truthfulness and the undermining of its coherent, autonomous subject – a source of significance and therefore of action.

(In)stating and (i)ronic, parody believes that representations are just ideological consequences derived from continuity and/or opposition, resounding *in/through beyond cinematic textuality*, with an interest in ideologically reshaping the subject in the context of cultural manifestations.

Using Jedediah Purdy (2000)'s argument as a starting point, *political performatism* is structured *against* the indifferent ironies of postmodernism, and *in favour* of assuming individual-degree political responsibilities inside post-ideological concepts, all these being undoubtedly influenced by the imperative of “a return of the phallus as a cultural motive force”. *Performatism* banks upon a (re)institution of *phallocracy*, dismantles the symbolic order of language and annihilates chains of significant. The performative linguistic arbitrariness re-values only the *frame* within which both the *sender* and the *receiver* are placed.

The third argument offers the idea that the hard core of any radical-avant-garde movement may lie (as Badiou – 2010 believed too) in the projection of an immediate present, in contrast to reactionary-classical movements; in fact, in a Freudian note, a re-investing of “the act with sense”, or, from a Jungian perspective, a re-affirming of *jouissance* as a positional exchange of imperative representational acts. In Zizek's interpretation the postmodern world's primordial effort resides in the temptation to do away with the concept of Master-Significant.

For Badiou, the abolition of the Master-Significant ensures an ideological query of the abyss, of *jouissance* seen as the final order regulating a life dedicated entirely to savouring postmodern pleasures, placed under the equality: weakening of *jouissance politics* = investing into administrative regulations of *jouissance*, as a *post-political effect*.

5. In place of conclusions: *Postmodernitarism* - a formula for sharing postmodernism

Annotating two of the critiques aimed at postmodernism, in Henri Meschonnic (1988) and Yve-Alain Bois (1988)'s way, an immediate result would allow one to enunciate a double idea: first, that the postmodern is tempted to separate from the modern, but it obsessively returns, generating an *interference* both in form and in content; second, that postmodernism seems to be irrigated by some currents which, far from seeing it as finished, manage to rescue it from the impending doom of being disparaged.

In fact, what *performatism* does is nothing more than a recalculation of these reflexes, assumed to be part of postmodernism's project.

Hence the conclusive need of the present project to (re) place the concept of *postmodernitarism* at the fulcrum of attention, as a novelty element, by a new analysis of the Rancière-ian (2012) perspective on *modernitarism assumed as a term between the identification of art's types of aesthetic regimen and types of fulfilling a personal chore/destiny*, and trying to impose it as a postmodernist *form of partaking*. We fall back upon the over-used Hassan-ian technicisms, where the operative term of *partaking* is filled with explicit references to “the process of sharing patrimony between two or more persons who have legitimate rights to claim it”.

According to Rancière, a superposition of aesthetic expression upon a failed/revolutionary program/paradigm completed *modernitarism's* destiny, received either through its *artistic side* (counter modernity) or its *political attribute*, considered a failure of the ontological-aesthetic model (2012, 32-33).

Postmodernism – as an inversion process - banked exactly upon this dual perspective – by acknowledging a certain state (demolishing, broken, mixed), an aesthetic principle/regimen affixed to the simple teleology of historical evolution/separation, through triggering a fundamental political reaction upon the essential conditions of change, by a meta-politics of political subjectivity, or by different futurologist virtualities.

From within modernitarism's pedestal, *postmodernitarism* borrows and replaces in the flow the un-symbolizing object, the forbidden representation, the original distance; all interleaved in a Rancierian mode to “the mourning and repentance of modernitarist thought” in the sense of a *morbid impetus of desire*.

Not at all aleatory, any research into Romanian performatism (in the spirit of Claudiu Komartin's manifesto) must acknowledge as potentiating form the direction of a cosmic Christianity, empowered by an incomplete dimension, with the needed coda stating that any death represents a type of sacrifice, acknowledging the concept that *any (object) can assume the mission of mediating between the human and the divine*.

Just another confirmation of the fact that, regardless of the title and content of our project, even accepting a fundamental erosion of its credibility, postmodernism remains inventive... to the end...

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